



Garfield County and Western Slope Residents Urged to Take Precautions to Prevent Hantavirus Infection

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Garfield County Public Health officials are warning residents to use precautions to avoid being exposed to hantavirus. Health officials announced Wednesday that a western Garfield County resident near the Mesa County line has been diagnosed with hantavirus infection.

Hantavirus infections occur yearly in Colorado and have occurred on the Western Slope in the past. The last human case of hantavirus in Garfield County was in 2006. While hantavirus can be deadly, the adult who became ill in 2006 survived. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention there is a 38 percent mortality rate associated with hantavirus.

Hantavirus is carried in the saliva, urine and droppings of deer mice. When dirt and dust contaminated with rodent saliva, urine, and droppings are stirred up the virus can become airborne. Most people become infected by breathing in the particles. Infection can also occur from being bitten by an infected mouse. The virus is not transmitted from person to person.

Early symptoms of hantavirus infection are muscle aches, fatigue, high fever, dizziness, headaches, chills and GI disturbances such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain. Within one to five days after early symptoms begin, late symptoms consistent with respiratory distress will begin. These symptoms include cough and difficulty breathing. The onset of these symptoms can take a few days to six weeks after exposure to begin. If hantavirus infection is suspected a person should seek medical care immediately from a healthcare provider. Sinus congestion, sneezing, runny nose and a cough producing phlegm are NOT symptoms of hantavirus.

Colorado residents who have deer mice or related species of mice in or around the home are at risk for hantavirus infection. Risk of infection can be reduced by taking precautions while cleaning up areas where rodents have been present, controlling rodent populations in and around the home, and preventing rodents from entering the home and surrounding structures.

Elisabeth Lawaczeck, state health veterinarian, said, "Sweeping or vacuuming an area where rodent droppings or dried rodent urine is present is NOT recommended. We recommend first wetting the area down with a bleach and water solution (one part bleach to nine parts water) or Lysol solution and keeping the area wet for 5 minutes prior to clean up. Wiping or mopping up the area, instead of sweeping or vacuuming, is a safer way to clean up rodent droppings."

Lawaczeck urged people to be particularly careful where there are mouse droppings and evidence that mice have been in and around the buildings or nearby wood or junk piles. A large, rapid increase in the number of mice around homes often precedes a human case, she said. "If you are living or staying in rural areas and have deer mice around, you can assume you and members of your family are at some risk. The more live mice that are present, the greater the risk, although some people have been infected by directly handling a single deer mouse," she said.

Homes can be rodent-proofed by eliminating food sources and removing abandoned vehicles, brush, wood and junk piles where rodents may hide. Other precautions that should be taken include:

- Rodent proof buildings by plugging holes or other mouse entryways. Conduct year-round rodent control, using traps or poisons, or hire a professional exterminator.
- Make home or work areas unattractive to rodents. Keep indoor areas clean, especially kitchens, Store food in rodent-proof containers and properly dispose of garbage in sealed containers. This includes pet, livestock and bird food.
- Store firewood at least 100 feet from the house. Keep vegetation around the house well trimmed.

Lawaczeck explained that the small gray house mice commonly found in urban areas do not carry the disease. Deer mice are brown on top and white underneath. They have large ears relative to their head size. House mice are all gray and have small ears.

For more hantavirus information, contact Garfield County Public Health at 970-625-5200, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at 1-800-866-2759 or visit <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/zoonosis/hanta/index.html> .

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